



THIS WEEK IN IRAQ

The Newsletter of the Multi-National Force - Iraq

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July 4, 2006

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U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Adrian Cadiz

An Iraqi Soldier from the 8th Division practices clearing a room during a cordon and search training class on Camp Echo, in southern Iraq, on June 26.

Official: 'Iraqis have strong will'

By Gerry J. Gilmore
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — Iraq's Soldiers and police are steadily gaining in capability so they can one day take charge of their country's security, a senior U.S. military officer said from Baghdad Friday.

"The Iraqi security forces are getting better every day," Army Col. Jeffrey J. Snow, commander of the 1st Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, told reporters during a satellite teleconference with the Pentagon press corps.

Snow's unit patrols western Baghdad and outlying areas in tandem with two Iraqi Army brigades.

Snow's 1st Brigade is preparing to return to its home base at Fort Drum, N.Y., after a year's deployment to Iraq.

The new Iraqi Army has "growing pains like any new army," the colonel acknowledged. Yet, the Iraqi troops, he said, have demonstrated "a strong will to fight and protect the Iraqi people."

Iraqi security force capabilities "will only get better with time," Snow said.

The 1st Brigade's area of responsibility encompasses about 186 square miles and contains about 1.3 million Iraqis, Snow said. Baghdad International Airport is part of the brigade's responsibility.

Snow said his unit is also tasked with providing maintenance and logistics training for new Iraqi security forces, noting he's pleased with their progress.

"We have trained two Iraqi Army brigades and one national police brigade that, to a certain extent, can plan, execute and sustain counterinsurgency operations with limited Coalition support," he said.

The 1st Brigade had controlled two-thirds of the area within its responsibility when it arrived in Iraq. Today, "Iraqi security forces are in the lead in two-thirds of the battlespace," he said, free-

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GENERAL CASEY'S CORNER

Tomorrow is the Fourth of July, our Independence Day.

It is our annual celebration commemorating the adoption in 1776 of the Declaration of Independence and our nation's birth.

But our nation's liberty was gained through great sacrifice and keeping it requires commitment. Few understand that more than service-members. Those who have fought for liberty know the costs.

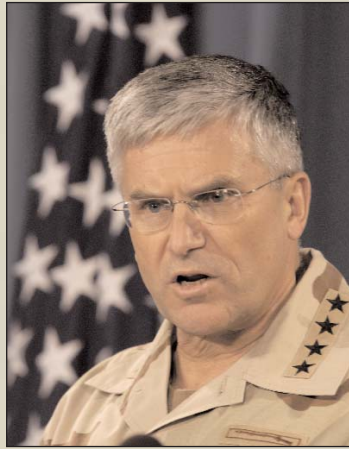
While America celebrates its independence, Iraq is engaged in its own struggle for liberty. We are assisting Iraqis in shaking off the shackles of oppression and entering a new era of independence.

Together we are making progress and it is remarkable how far we have come in the past two years in Iraq.

The Iraqi people drafted and ratified a constitution. They persevered through the transfer of sovereignty from the Interim Iraqi Government, the Iraqi Transitional Government, and finally the seating of a democratic constitution-based government. They voted in increasing numbers for their freedom, with approximately 12 million of the registered 15.5 million eligible voters casting a vote on Dec. 15 for representatives in the new Iraqi parliament.

Similar to our struggle for liberty, Iraqi service-

By Gen. George W. Casey Jr.
Multi-National Force - Iraq



"Together we are making progress and it is remarkable how far we have come in the past two years in Iraq."

members are sacrificing for the good of their nation.

Two years ago, there were a handful of security forces. Today there are more than 268,000 trained and deployed Iraqi security forces. They are increasingly taking over security responsibility from Coalition forces.

Today, the 5th Iraqi Army Division is assuming security responsibility in Diyala from Task Force Band of Brothers.

Later this month, Muthanna will be the first province to transition to complete Iraqi security control.

As the Iraqi security forces grow in numbers

and proficiency, they are gaining victories both independently and with their Coalition allies.

Iraqi and Coalition forces have eliminated terrorist safe havens along the Tigris and Euphrates River Valley, restoring Iraqi control to the Syrian border.

Together, we are dismantling al-Qaida in Iraq. We have achieved much in the fight against terrorism and for independence while the terrorists have lost at every turn. They have failed to regain safe havens, disrupt the democratic process, stop the development of the ISF, or undermine the Coalition. We killed al-Qaida in Iraq's top leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and several of his lieutenants.

With improved security comes progress.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has a plan to move toward a prosperous Iraq on all fronts and we are here to assist until we are no longer needed.

Although persistent violence has made the last two years tough, we have made irreversible progress and are now poised to make 2006 a decisive year in the areas of unity, security and prosperity.

This will assure the liberty and independence of the Iraqi people.

Happy Independence Day to both of our great countries.

Unity, Security, Prosperity



Iraqi National Security Advisor Muwafaq al-Rubai speaks to an Iraqi who was just released from the Abu Ghraib Theater Internment Facility on June 27.



Iraqi Soldiers with the 3rd Iraqi Army Division provide security before entering a propane factory in Ramadi on June 24.



Iraqi cooks prepare a meal for Iraq security forces recently at Camp Delta in western Iraq.

GENERAL CASEY'S CORNER

Iraqi officers learn to reach public

Story by Army Sgt. 1st Class
Tami Reiman
MNSTC-I Public Affairs

CAMP TAJI — Eight more Iraqi officers and civilians graduated from the Ministry of Defense Public Affairs Officer Course on June 26, bringing the number of qualified Iraqi public affairs officers in the MOD to about 30.

The course is held at Taji Military Training Base, north of Baghdad. The first class graduated 19 officers on May 25.

"I think this first course accomplished exactly what we needed it to - it laid the building blocks for stronger public affairs capability in the Iraqi Ministry of Defense," said U.S. Air Force Capt. Jeremy L. Eggers, a public affairs leadership development instructor.

During the three-week course, students were taught the fundamentals of public affairs. These fundamentals included writing speeches and news stories, responding to queries from the media, conducting on-camera interviews, press conferences and interacting with Iraqi and Arabic media.

The course prepared the students for their final two-day exercise, which incorporated the public affairs tools the students were taught.

According to Iraqi Brig. Gen. Kasem, a Joint-Headquarters spokesman for the MOD, the course will equip the media staff in the MOD and Iraqi Armed Forces with a new media science and help to find

a way to connect all of the army units, media and public affairs. He said this will help deliver information between the military units and the ministry.

"This course will help to deliver information on army activities in the battlefield to reflect a true picture of their performance," Kasem said. "It will also allow us to reach out to the Iraqi people and international community to give them the accurate information on events occurring in the field."

Kasem said he feels this course is an important step for the Iraqi Army.

"I think training in public affairs for the military is important at this stage when we are building the new army," Kasem said.

"This course trains the joint headquarters and the MOD, presents the truth to the Iraqi people, and it is the truth that will beat terrorism and the propaganda campaigns they wage," he added.

Eggers said the final phase of the course focuses on performance.

"The final training exercise is one last opportunity for the students to apply all that they have learned during the course," said Eggers. "It serves as a confidence builder as much as it serves as a final check on fundamental public affairs skills."

The best part of the final exercise was the press conference, said Zeyad, a student.

"We were able to apply all the information that had been presented to us in theory and apply it in the cor-

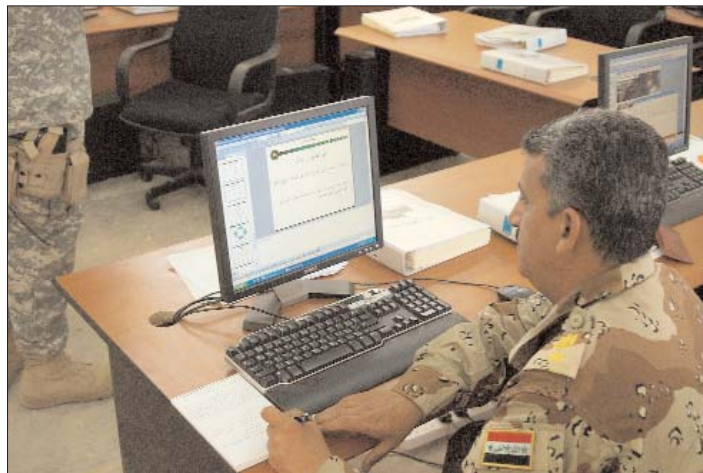


Photo by U.S. Army Master Sgt. Ryan Mosier

Students in the Ministry of Defense Public Affairs Officer Course prepare a response to a media question at Camp Taji on May 11.

rect manner. Everybody benefited from the practical exercises," said Zeyad.

U.S. Army Master Sgt. Ryan Mosier, a course instructor, said the intent of the course was to give the students a basic set of public affairs skills.

He said there were three things that Multi-National Security Transition Command - Iraq hoped to accomplish with this first class: to train and field qualified and competent officers who can guide the Iraqi Army and their commanders in public affairs operations, to find out what works for the class, what doesn't work and what can be done differently for future classes and to identify training needs and give extra training to those individuals who will be the future instructors.

Eggers agreed.

"The graduates of this first course, some of whom will return to teach future courses, have a responsibility to build that capability, which may include things such as expanding the course, introducing new courses focusing on communication technology, and perhaps including greater interaction with the Arab media," said Eggers.

"As the saying goes, 'The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.' Well, we're more than a couple of steps along, but we still have a long way to go," said Eggers.



Photo by U.S. Army Master Sgt. Ryan Mosier

A student in the Ministry of Defense Public Affairs Officer Course reviews lesson notes on media interviews at Camp Taji on May 11.

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ing U.S. and other Iraqi forces to engage the enemy outside of Baghdad.

"Because of the growing effectiveness of Iraqi security forces, we were able to expand Coalition efforts to the west of Baghdad ... We have been able to disrupt insurgent networks and the route lines they used to travel into Baghdad by denying insurgents crucial support zones and destroying their caches," he said.

This increased pressure has forced the enemy "to adopt new tactics as our combined offensive operations have continually disrupted insurgent activities," Snow said.

Any increases in the number of terrorist attacks within his sector are likely caused by stepped-up U.S. and Iraqi offensive operations, he said.

"Iraqis want to see the enemies of freedom

and oppression defeated as much as we do." About \$150 million has been spent to improve the quality of life for Iraqi citizens living within his area. Brigade troops have provided medical care, built water treatment and sewage facilities, repaired electric generating stations and renovated 35 schools.

The 1st Brigade's accomplishments in Iraq have come at a cost.

Eleven 10th Mountain Soldiers "will not return with us when we go home," Snow said.

"They are gone, but not forgotten, and I assure you they will never be forgotten," the colonel vowed.

Yet, the Soldiers' morale remains high, Snow said, noting the 1st Brigade has met its annual unit re-enlistment goal in just seven months.

"These Soldiers understand the mission, and they're willing to continue the fight."

Hundreds of IPs graduate

Story and photo by
Sgt. 1st Class Rick Brown
MNSTC-I Public Affairs

BAGHDAD — The Iraqi Minister of Interior hosted the graduation of 444 new Iraqi policemen at Baghdad Police College Thursday.

Jawad Al-Bolani spoke to new graduates about their commitment and responsibility to all Iraqi citizens, regardless of religious affiliation.

Recruits took an oath of allegiance to the people of Iraq and to the constitution, which MOI and Coalition leaders emphasize "is not to a dictator or individual." Al-Bolani said the oath helps drive a wedge between terrorists and police forces, and diminishes the chance of insurgent infiltration into the ranks.

Following the ceremony, Iraqi Police Brig. Gen. Hussein, dean of the college, answered questions from the media about sectarian division in the ranks.

"We have recruits from all areas - Shia, Sunni and Christian," he said through an interpreter.

"They all get the same training. It makes no difference."

The 10-week training includes instruction on small-arms, human rights, traffic control,



Iraqi policemen graduate from the Baghdad Police College on Thursday.

police investigation techniques and searches.

He said graduates will be assigned to different areas of Iraq to meet the needs of the ministry.

About 116,000 Iraqi Police officers have been trained in the past three years.

To accelerate an increased Iraqi Police presence, the Baghdad Police College is undergoing several renovation projects totaling \$68 million.

A forensic training laboratory, ballistics chamber, reference library, outdoor firing ranges and classrooms including new computer-generated indoor training simulators are planned for the facility.

The academy was built in 1936 and has a capacity of about 1,200 to 1,500 students.



Hero of the Week

Samarra leader improves his city

Story by Staff Sgt. Nikki Prodomos
133rd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

SAMARRA — A man in Samarra has been a key figure in improving the lives of residents in this city north of Baghdad - often at his own expense and personal sacrifice.

Samarra City Council President Asaad Ali Yaseen has taken a holistic approach to healing his hometown. The 53-year-old businessman has become a link between Coalition Forces, Iraqi Security Forces, local and provincial governance and his constituents by serving in a leadership position and providing goods and services to the town.

"I have a big heart ... I'm almost like a bank for the city and I try to provide them with whatever they need," said Yaseen.

When Samarra's hospital needed climate-control and ambulance repairs, Yaseen pulled the money out of his pocket.

With money earned from construction and imports, he published a local newspaper - the first post-Saddam era publication in the city.

Despite the risk to his safety, Yaseen has even made trips to neighboring Sulaymaniyah Province, where he's helping to establish a city welfare system.

He makes regular trips to Tikrit where he works with the Salah ad Din provincial council to ensure Samarra receives funding for upgrades to the city's water, sewage and electrical systems.

He also plans to give urban youth an alternative to violence by lobbying the local legislature to provide 3,000 soccer balls, uniforms and shoes.

Teams would compete on one of 20 soccer fields he plans to construct - soccer fields his own family won't be able to enjoy because of safety concerns.

"I had to send my wife and children away. There were just too many death



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Melissa Thornhill

Maj. Steven L. Delvaux, left, with the 101st Airborne Division, greets Samarra's City Council President Asaad Ali Yaseen in Samarra. Yaseen has spent much of his own money to improve the lives of city residents.

threats and assassination attempts," Yaseen said.

He said his family will return to Iraq when they are free from danger.

Because of security concerns, Yaseen's downtown mansion looks more like a fortress. When visitors pull up to the fenced compound, they are met by his security personnel. He pays the guards out-of-pocket and they are never far from him.

Despite his charity, he is still the tar-

get of slanderous graffiti, death threats and assassination attempts.

Yaseen said he will continue to forge ahead anyway with his many projects to improve his community.

"Mr. Asaad is an inspiration to all of us. He is standing up against the insurgents and leading Samarra when no one else will. His courage and leadership are truly heroic," said 1st Lt. Peter Hegseth, a civil affairs officer with the 101st Airborne Division in Samarra.

Bush thanks Japan for Iraq support

By Sgt. Sara Wood
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — Thanks to the work of Japanese defense forces, Iraqi security forces are now ready to take control of the province where Japanese troops worked, President Bush said Thursday.

"The people of Japan can be proud of the contribution their self-defense forces have made in the war on terror, and Americans are proud to serve alongside such courageous allies," Bush said at an arrival ceremony for Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi at the White House.

Koizumi announced June 20 that Japan would withdraw its roughly 550 troops, engaged in reconstruction and humanitarian work, from their base in Samawa in Iraq's southern province of Muthanna.

Koizumi said that although his troops are leaving Iraq, Japan will continue to provide airlift support and any other support needed to Coalition troops in Iraq.

"As a responsible member of the international community, through cooperation with various countries concerned and through cooperation with the United Nations, Japan will continue to provide support and help the Iraqis get back on their feet," Koizumi said at a news conference following his meeting with Bush.

At the news conference, Bush said that he and Koizumi also discussed the North Korean missile threat, and agreed that the U.S. and Japan must remain united in sending a clear message to North Korea that a missile launch is unacceptable. North Korea should brief all countries concerned with this problem as to the intentions of the missile launch, Bush said.

Koizumi agreed, saying that Japan and the United States need to maintain close coordination and encourage North Korea to become a responsible member of the international community. The relationship between Japan and the U.S. is remarkable,

because 60 years ago the two countries were at war, and now they are working together to develop democracy in other parts of the world, Bush said. He said he appreciates Koizumi's understand-

ing of democracy's power to do good and his willingness to commit Japan's forces to support the war on terror.

"Japan is making a mighty contribution to new democracy, which I strongly believe is in our nation's interests and I strongly believe will yield peace," Bush said. "And I firmly believe that the example that we show today will be repeated over the decades, particularly with newly elected leaders in the Middle East."

Japan has learned from its past and is now determined to maintain friendly relations

"Japan is making a mighty contribution to new democracy, which I strongly believe is in our nation's interests ..."

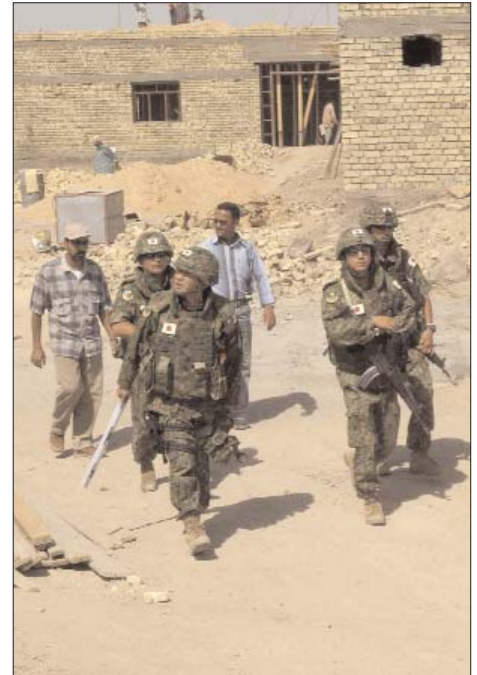


Photo courtesy of Australian MOD

Japan Self-Defense Force members observe progress on a Muthanna Province building project in Oct., 2005.

with the United States, Koizumi said. The U.S.-Japan relationship is one of the most important in the world, he said, and Thursday's meeting firmed the leaders' resolve to work together on world challenges.

"A Japan-U.S. alliance is not just an alliance for our two countries; it is an alliance for the world, and in the interests of the world, we were able to confirm that we need to cooperate with each other," he said.

A little down time...



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Adrian Cadiz

Iraqi Soldiers from the 8th Division take a break after training at Camp Echo in southern Iraq on June 26.

IPs get new 'blue' patrol vehicles

Story and photo by Sgt. Zach Mott
4th Infantry Division

BAQOUBA — Iraqi Police recently started driving their new 'Smurfvees' - a nickname given to the blue-colored versions of U.S.-built Humvees.

The paint resembles that of the 1980's cartoon characters called 'Smurfs,' but actually represents the IPs' blue uniform color.

Members of the 978th Military Police Company based at Fort Bliss, Texas showed the Iraqis how to operate and maintain the custom four-wheel-drive vehicles during an operator's course at Forward Operating Base Warhorse, north of Baghdad.

"At first the IPs were worried about sticking out, but ... we pointed out that they had the same paint scheme on everything else that they drive," said Sgt. Andrew Turner, a course instructor.

Most IPs drive pick-up trucks with little

armor, but the armored 'Smurfvees' will better protect the occupants from bullets and help shield them from explosives.

"They're going to be safer driving this," Turner said.

During the four-day course, six policemen drove the vehicles over rough terrain, on patrol and at night before they could drive them back to the station.

Police mechanics also learned how to service the 'Smurfvees' and became familiar with the vehicles' components.

Sgt. Omar Mohammed Khalifa, an IP mechanic, said he was glad to learn what was under the hood, and recognized how the vehicles could help the IP mission.

"We're doing all this because we want to perform our duty to protect our country and our people," he said.



An Iraqi Policeman jumps in the driver's seat of a Humvee during recent training in Baqouba.

Photo of the week...



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Jeremy T. Lock

U.S. Army Lt. Col. Jeffrey Kelly with the 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team talks with his interpreter along the Tigris River near Mosul on June 21.

Coalition tracks down Soldiers' killers

Story by Sgt. Kristopher Joseph
Multi-National Corps - Iraq

While military medical examiners officially confirmed the identities of two Coalition Soldiers found dead near Yusufiyah Thursday, Coalition and Iraqi security forces intensified efforts to track down the terrorists responsible for killing three Multi-National Division – Baghdad troops on June 16 and bring them to justice.

Spc. David J. Babineau was killed during an attack on a three-man security team manning a checkpoint before terrorists overwhelmed the position, taking Pfc. Kristian Menchaca and Pfc. Thomas L. Tucker to an unknown location and killing them.

The attack occurred south of Yusufiyah where the Soldiers were guarding a canal crossing next to the Euphrates River.

Within an hour of the attack, the area was cordoned off by both air and ground forces and search operations began.

A force of more than 8,000 Coalition and Iraqi security forces assembled to take part in the search. The force included three MND-B brigade combat teams, Iraqi Army, national and local police, units from Multi-National Force – West, Navy and Air Force aircraft and other Coalition forces.

Coalition and Iraqi security forces used all available resources including, air, ground and water assets to locate the Soldiers. Air Force parascue dive teams searched the canals while engineers patrolled the Euphrates River and Coalition unmanned aerial vehicles and helicopters patrolled from the sky.

Twenty-five military operations were conducted, including 11 air assault missions. More than 12 villages and an abandoned power plant were searched. Twelve Soldiers were wounded in the effort to locate the missing Soldiers.



U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Bart A. Bauer

A Soldier from the 101st Airborne Division uses a night vision monocular to scan the area around a checkpoint in East Baghdad on June 27.

Six weapons caches were discovered. Two of the caches were found in the power plant. Contraband found in the caches included a suicide vest, gun powder, plastic explosives with detonation cord, grenades, rifles and homemade rocket launch-

“A force of more than 8,000 Coalition and Iraqi security forces assembled to take part in the search.”

ers with several rockets.

Iraqi citizens from across Baghdad provided almost 80 tips related to the search – all were investigated. Coalition Soldiers spoke with local religious, community and political leaders to gain information.

The enemy conducted a series of harassing attacks with improvised explosive devices during the search effort. Ten IEDs detonated and 17 were found by searchers before they detonated.

Coalition and Iraqi security forces

detained 36 suspected insurgents involved in the murders and killed two enemy fighters.

Acting on tips from a local Iraqi tribal leader and a detainee, MND-B Soldiers discovered two bodies next to a road near the village of Mufaraji, northwest of Yusufiyah, on June 19 at about 7:50 p.m. A local man told the Soldiers to watch for explosives.

The area around the bodies was cordoned and security was established. An explosive ordnance disposal team arrived to clear the area of explosives the next morning.

Engineers cleared the route up to the bodies, encountering three roadside bombs in the process. The two bodies, severely traumatized, were found bound together with an IED was between one of the Soldier's legs. The engineers successfully removed the IED and cleared the surrounding area to allow recovery of the bodies.

The remains were airlifted to a

See OPERATIONS, next page

Operations

from previous page

Coalition morgue near Baghdad International Airport by 8:25 a.m. Tuesday before they were sent to Dover Air Force Base, Del.

A formal investigation has been directed by Maj. Gen. James D. Thurman, the commanding general of MND-B, to determine the facts surrounding the attack on the Soldiers.

Two al-Qaida in Iraq terrorists were killed in this operation, one was a senior al-Qaida in Iraq lieutenant.

The search continues for additional terrorists responsible for the attack.

Forty detainees from previous operations have been questioned about their connection with individuals linked to the murders. Two detainees captured in the vicinity of the remains have admitted to being al-Qaida members.

Terror cell leader caught

Iraqi security forces conducted an early morning raid south of Baghdad on Tuesday, capturing the

key member and facilitator of an insurgent cell in the Arab Jabor area.

Abdullah Haydar Nasir Al-Juburi was captured at his home by Iraqi security forces during a pre-dawn raid just west of Salmanpak. Coalition forces advisers were there to assist the Iraqi forces.

Al Juburi used his home to harbor terrorists of a local cell who train, live and operate in this area.

The cell is responsible for mortar and improvised explosive device attacks against Coalition forces, including two IED attacks on convoys that killed three Coalition Soldiers.

Al-Qaida member nabbed

Coalition forces detained one al-Qaida in Iraq terrorist during a raid near Baqouba on Wednesday.

The terrorist had ties to senior al-Qaida leaders throughout the region. Ground troops secured his house and detained him without incident.

Coalition forces also found weapons, hidden ammunition and \$4,000 in sequentially numbered U.S. \$100 bills at the initial target location.

Raids net terrorists

Coalition forces detained 14 terrorists during raids north of Yusifiyah the morning of June 26.

Two of the captured are known leaders of the Tawhid Wa'al Jihad and Jaysh al-Islami insurgent groups in the Yusifiyah area. The two groups have launched joint attacks against Iraqi and Coalition security forces.

The troops quickly secured targeted buildings and captured the terrorists without incident. Coalition forces are using intelligence gathered from the raids in follow-up operations.

Iraqis nab IED cell members

Iraqi forces, with Coalition advisers in support, raided three areas in western Baghdad on June 23, capturing three members of an IED cell and detaining five others as part of "Together Forward," a Baghdad security operation.

The terrorists were operating in the Al-Mansour district of Baghdad. The cell is suspected of two IED attacks on Coalition forces in the Gazaliyah area in March and a rocket attack on the Baghdad International Airport in April.

Free snacks...



U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Michael Larson

An Iraqi Soldier gives food to Iraqi citizens during a medical operation in Baghdad on June 24.

Rebuilding Iraq

Projects that are shaping a nation

Ninawa Province

About 450 students will benefit from a school renovation.



Mosul dam community revitalized

Story by Claude D. McKinney
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

MOSUL — Far upstream on the Tigris River, a large dam forms a 50-mile-long lake. The dam has an electric power generating plant that provides most of the electricity to Mosul, a city of about 1.5 million, 25 miles away.

A community of about 4,000 is just north of the dam. Workers from this community service the dam and provide security for the area.

A school is being built there and a police station has been renovated.

"The completion of this police station goes a long way to engendering confidence in the local Iraqi government's ability to protect its citizens," said Sheryl Leeper, an engineer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Mosul.

The police station is one of more than 30 police stations receiving upgrades within Iraq's seven northern provinces.

Other improvements to roads and the dam's foundation are ongoing.

Baghdad Province

Water

About 120,000 residents of Doura have an improved water and sewer network.

Electrical

About 60,000 people in Karkh have improved electrical service with the installation of an overhead electrical distribution network in two different neighborhoods.

Public Buildings

About 35,000 people have basic medical care with the rehabilitation of the Hussein Public Health Clinic.

Roads

About 15,000 Taji residents will benefit from about a mile of paved road.

Services

Iraqi Soldiers at Camp Victory will benefit from the installation of 38 workstations with telephones, laptop computers and back-up power.



Najaf Province

Residents of Header will benefit from the paving of about 10 miles of road.



Maysan Province

Residents in Al-Amarah are safer with a new Iraqi Highway Police headquarters.

Official: 'Golden dome terrorist nabbed'

By Gerry J. Gilmore
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — A key al-Qaida operative implicated in the February bombing of a prominent Iraqi mosque was captured last month, a senior U.S. military officer said in Baghdad Thursday.

Iraqi National Security Adviser Mouwafak al-Rubaie announced Wednesday that terrorist Abu Qudama had been seized by Kurdish peshmerga troops after a May 20 firefight north of Baghdad.

Army Maj. Gen. William B. Caldwell IV told reporters at a news briefing that Abu Qudama, a Tunisian, is an admitted participant of the Feb. 22 bombing of the Golden Dome, a holy Shiite mosque in Samarra. The bombing set off sectarian violence across Iraq.

The terrorist's capture wasn't announced earlier, Caldwell said, because Iraqi and Coalition authorities probably wanted more time to extract intelligence.

Abu Qudama is also known as Yousri Fakher Mohammed Ali. His compatriot and the ringleader of the Golden Dome bombing, Haitham Sabah Shaker Mohammed al-Badri, remains at large.

Lately, al-Qaida has experienced several reversals of fortune in Iraq. Previous al-Qaida in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was killed June 7 in an air strike by a U.S. F-16 jet. Now, U.S. and Coalition forces have set their sights on getting Zarqawi's successor, Egyptian Abu Ayyub al-Masri.

"There is no question that if we can take him down that will just disrupt the organization to the point to where it would be ineffective for a long period of time," Caldwell said.

Zarqawi's death, Abu Qudama's capture and other recent setbacks have disrupted al-Qaida's operations in Iraq, Caldwell said.

And, "that has given us to opportunity to find and track down" more al-Qaida terrorists, the general said.

Iraqi and Coalition security forces

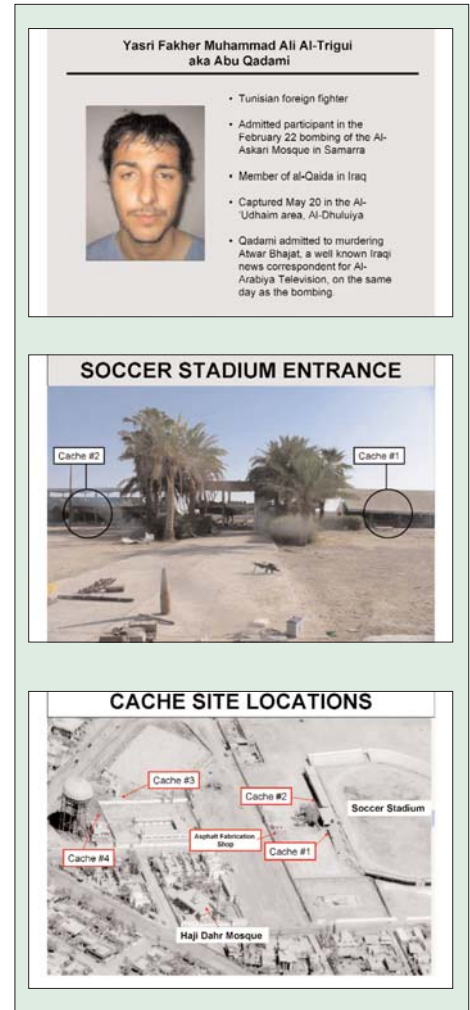
remain focused on pressuring the terrorists, said Caldwell, spokesman for Multi-National Force - Iraq, noting that 57 foreign terrorists have been killed or captured in Iraq this month.

Caldwell cited the exploits of Army's 172nd Stryker Brigade Soldiers who surprised a group of insurgents last week during an operation near Mosul. The brigade employed an unmanned aerial vehicle, he said, to pinpoint insurgents who'd fired a mortar round at a nearby U.S. base.

The Americans used the Global Positioning System to track the terrorists to their lair and captured nine - including five Syrians, Caldwell said. The GIs also freed a kidnapping victim, the general said, and seized a large cache of enemy ordnance.

Another recent operation conducted by U.S. and Iraqi forces uncovered four large weapons caches hidden in and around a soccer stadium in Ramadi, Caldwell said. Materials used for making improvised explosive devices, anti-personnel mines and other weapons were seized.

"Iraqi and Coalition forces are working side by side to eliminate these foreign terrorists who attempt to hijack the development and building of a stable, peaceful Iraq," Caldwell said.



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Jeremy T. Lock

Soldiers from the 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team out of Fort Wainwright, Alaska provide security along the Tigris River near Mosul during a weapons cache search June 21.

Multi-National Force Photos From Across Iraq



U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Shawn Hussong

Soldiers from 101st Airborne Division climb over a wall during a raid in Samaria on June 20.



U.S. Army Cpl. Joshua Selfe shakes hands with a local Iraqi boy while on patrol in Bedrani on June 19.

Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Katrina Beeler



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Adrian Cadiz

Iraqi Soldiers from the 8th Division practice storming a house during a training class at Camp Echo on June 26.



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Richard Rose

An Iraqi Police officer shaves in preparation for an inspection at the Abu Ghraib Police Station on June 24.



Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Katrina Beeler

An Iraqi mother and her child watch a patrol from their doorway in Bedrani on June 19.

John Bourgeois, center, a contractor with the U.S. Army, teaches security procedures to Iraqi Police officers at the Abu Ghraib Police Station on June 24.



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Richard Rose